

Case Study

Mrs C. made a complaint to the Council that she had been recharged by the Housing Department for not allowing access to her property when an electrician had attended for an out of hours call. The Council's tenancy agreement allows that a recharge can be made if there is clear evidence of a tenant not allowing access to the property when repairs are required. There is also a recorded message advising tenants that they may be recharged when they report a repair through the out of hours service. Housing Officers also have a clear procedure for when recharges are to be made.

Before being considered as a Stage 2 complaint recharges follow a 2 stage appeals process. At both stages of the appeals process, carried out by the Area Housing Office, it was felt that the recharge had been made appropriately. Mrs C. asked for this to be reviewed.

The Public Sector Housing Officer therefore considered the complaint and she observed the following information;

Mrs C. claimed she was in the property on the date and time the operative called and that no card was left at the property to indicate she had missed the call. The Council's report showed that an operative had called to Mrs C's property but he had failed to gain access, therefore a charge was raised for an abortive call.

On further investigation it was confirmed that operatives do not leave calling cards if they fail to gain access. Therefore, without this supporting evidence, the case was considered to be a 50/50 situation where the Council's records showed an operative had attended the property but Mrs C. claimed she was in all evening but nobody had called. On this occasion the Chief Housing Officer upheld the complaint at stage 2 of the Complaints Procedure and the recharge was withdrawn.

As a result of this complaint, practices for out of hours calls have been reviewed and brought in line with calls attended to during normal working hours. If an operative fails to gain access the revised procedure requires the out of hours operative to contact the control room who will then attempt to contact the tenant by telephone to advise them the operative is at the property. Details of these calls are then recorded on the call sheet. The Council has therefore improved the service for tenants and reduced costs.

As stated above, the Council has also from April 2015 implemented a revised appeals procedure for housing recharges. The procedure will include the use of an independent Recharge Review Panel comprising Senior Housing Officers, a Councillor and a Tenant.